

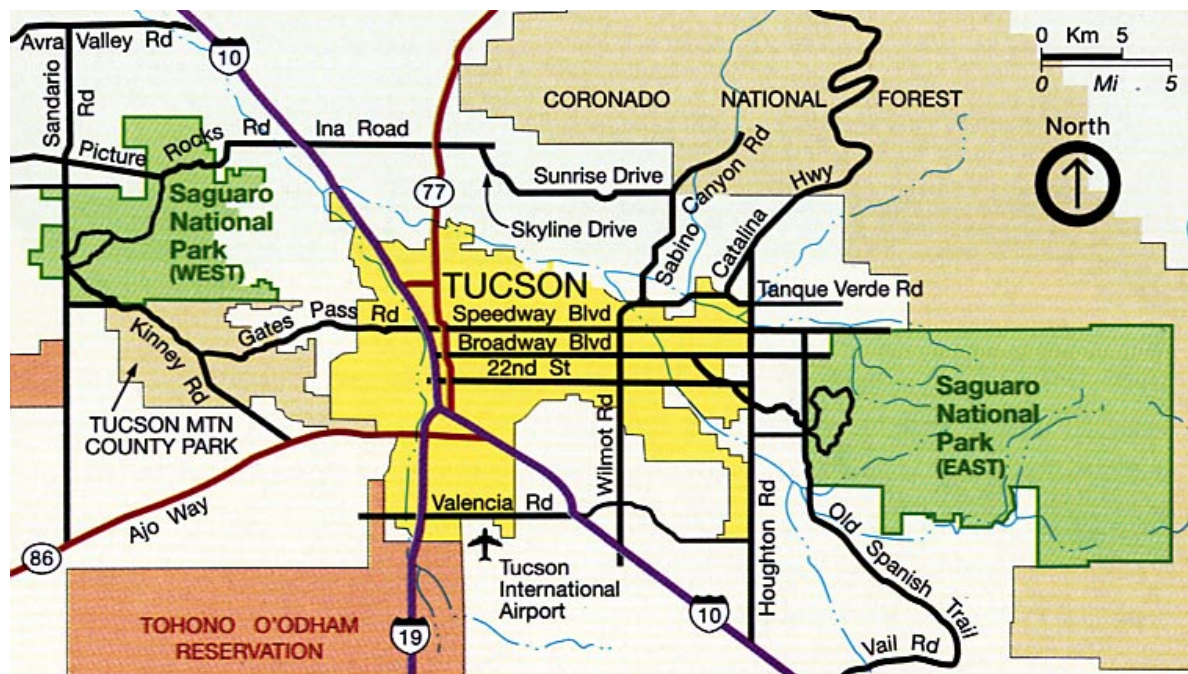
Report

Saguaro National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Saguaro National Park, located near Tucson, Arizona, was established as a National Monument in 1933. It was re-designated as a National Park in 1994. Giant saguaro cacti, unique to the Sonoran Desert, sometimes reach a height of 50 feet in this cactus forest that covers the valley floor, rising into the Rincon and Tucson Mountains. Figure 1 is a general vicinity map of Saguaro National Park.

Figure 1. General Vicinity Map of Saguaro National Park

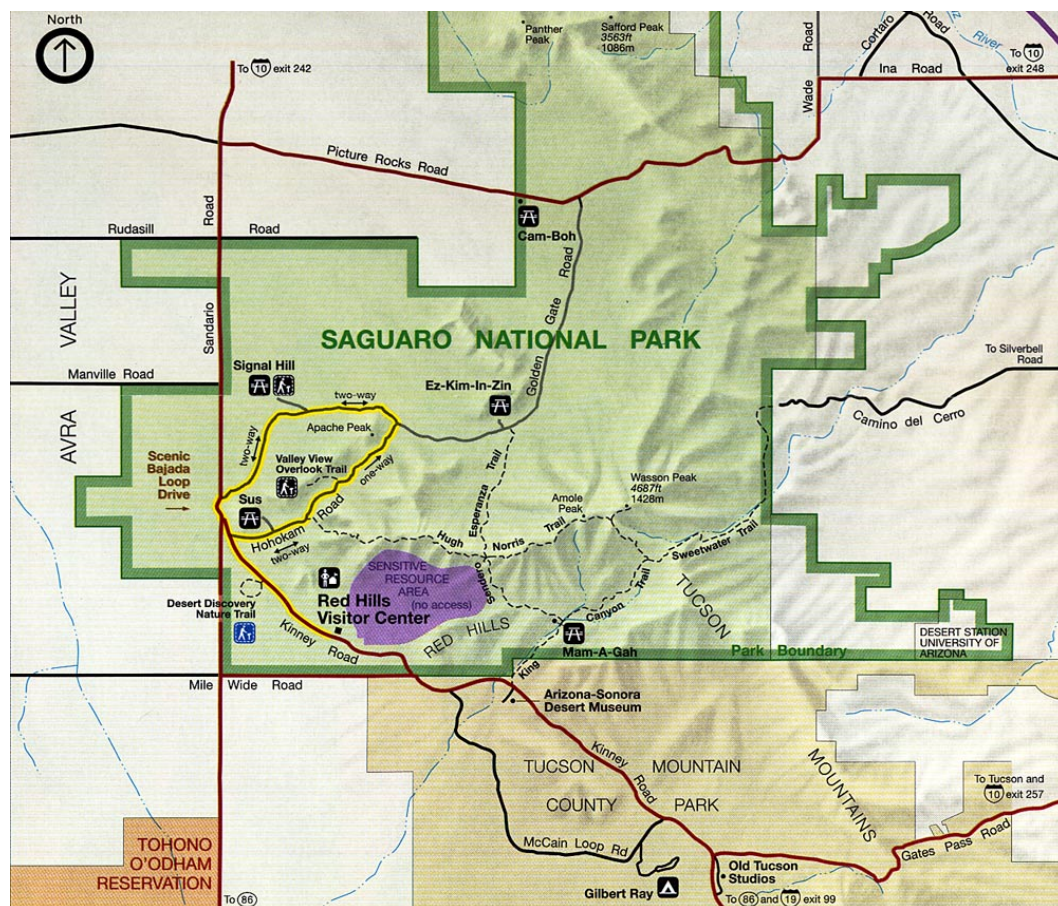


Saguaro National Park consists of two districts, Saguaro West and the much larger Saguaro East. The areas, separated by the Tucson metropolitan area (population approximately 800,000), are about 30 miles apart. Together, they preserve approximately 91,000 acres of the life and landscape of the Sonoran Desert, including the Park's namesake, the saguaro cactus. Saguaro West constitutes approximately 24,000 acres and includes the following:

- **The Red Hills Visitor Center.** This has exhibits, audio-visual programs, brochures, books, and trail and drive guides.
- **Scenic Drive.** The nine-mile Bajada Loop Drive begins at the Visitor Center and passes through a dense saguaro forest. Six of the nine miles are unpaved.
- **Trails.** A paved walkway through a collection of desert plants is located at the Visitor Center. Two nature trails are within one mile of the Visitor Center. One of these is accessible to persons with disabilities. Other longer trails also are located within Saguaro West.
- **Four picnic areas are located along park roads.** A fifth is located in the backcountry, accessible only by trail.

Figure 2 shows a map of Saguaro West.

Figure 2. Saguaro West

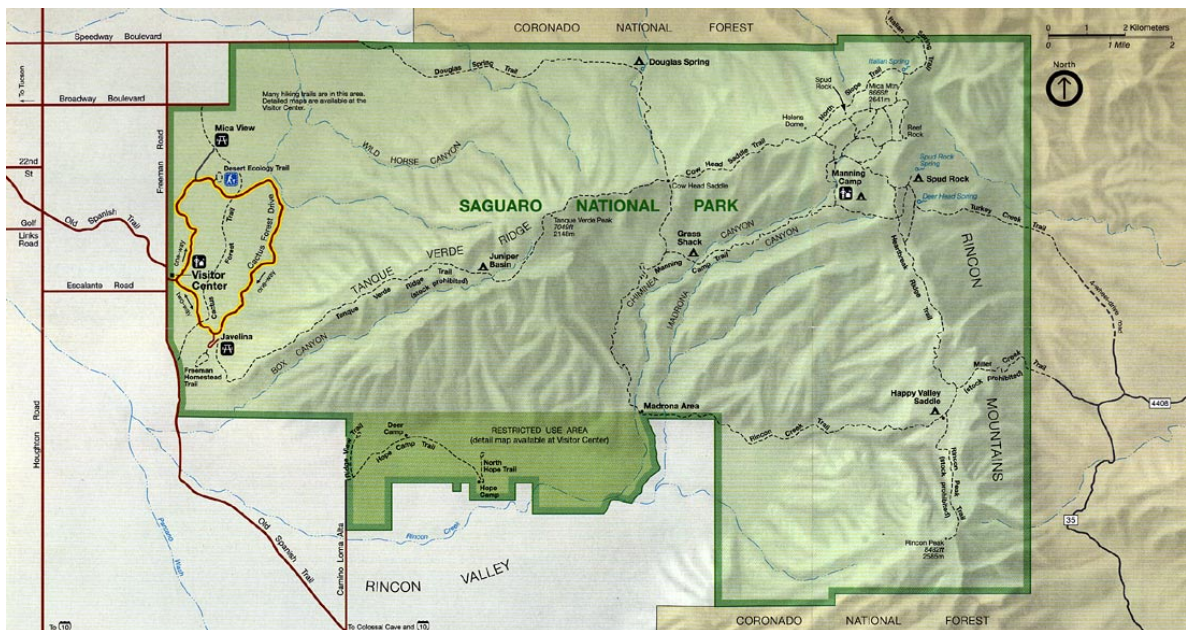


Saguaro East constitutes approximately 67,000 acres and includes the following:

- A Visitor Center. This has books, brochures, trail and drive guides, maps, exhibits, and a slide program on the saguaro and Sonoran Desert.
- Scenic Drive. The eight-mile one-way Cactus Forest Drive winds through the heart of an extensive saguaro forest. The road is paved.
- Trails. Approximately 128 miles of trails exist in Saguaro East. One self-guiding trail is accessible to persons with disabilities. Trails along Cactus Forest Drive provide for short hikes. Several longer trails penetrate the Rincon Mountains.
- Backcountry camping is allowed at designated sites. Permits must be obtained at the Visitor Center.
- Two picnic areas are located along Cactus Forest Drive.

Figure 3 shows a map of Saguaro East.

Figure 3. Saguaro East



Annual visitation for Saguaro National Park is approximately 3,000,000 persons. The peak visitation month is March. Peak days are on weekends. Two-thirds of visitors are commuters traveling to and from Tucson along Picture Rocks Road in Saguaro West. One-third of visitors make recreational/educational visits of one to four hours. A few visitors in Saguaro East backpack for two to five days. The Park is open daily between sunrise and sunset. Visitor centers are open daily, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., daily, except Christmas.

The current General Management Plan (GMP) recommends closure of Picture Rocks Road within park boundaries when an alternative route for commuters is built. Pima County, the Town of Marana, private developers, and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) have \$25 million committed to construct an east-west Twin Peaks Road and the Linda Vista interchange at the junction of I-10 and Twin Peaks Road. The NPS will not close Picture Rocks Road until Twin Peaks Road and the Linda Vista interchange are completed. The GMP recommends many safety improvements, even for Picture Rocks Road.

Bicycling is prevalent in Saguaro National Park. Bike routes between Tucson and Saguaro East are very good and are used by many cyclists. In Saguaro East, the NPS provides 24-hour bike access, a bike shelter with water, and paved and single-track bike routes. Saguaro West provides bike access, a shaded shelter, and paved and dirt roads. There are plans to convert three miles of Golden Gate Road to a multi-use trail closed to motorized vehicles. Bike access to and from Saguaro West is poor.

Current transportation problems identified by Saguaro National Park staff include:

- Parking lots at visitor centers and trailheads are crowded, especially in Saguaro East. Many users live nearby and drive to Saguaro National Park to exercise.
- There is no recreational vehicle (RV) or bus parking in Saguaro East.
- There is no linkage to public transit in Tucson. Most out-of-town visitors stay overnight in Tucson, but cannot get to and from the Park by public transit.
- There is never enough parking to hold special events.

Some resource conservation issues related to transportation also exist. These include:

- Picture Rocks Road. Because it is a commuter route, it does not provide a “park experience.” Its use damages resources, and it is unsafe.
- High-use days result in new and enlarged turnouts and damage to vegetation.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are no existing Alternative Transit Systems (ATS) at Saguaro National Park.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Potential ATS needs identified include:

- Linking of Tucson's transit system to/from the Park;
- Shuttle system(s) between the Park and nearby hotels; and
- Shuttle systems within the Park.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The potential ATSs identified above would have the following benefits:

- Linking of Tucson's transit system and/or implementing shuttle system(s) to/from the Park would help alleviate the need for additional parking. The construction of additional parking spaces could be detrimental to park natural resources.
- Shuttle systems within the Park would help alleviate the problems identified above, plus provide alternative transportation for persons arriving at the Park by Tucson's transit system and/or hotel shuttles.

The benefits of either of these potential ATSs would need to be weighed against capital and maintenance costs of the systems, and resource issues involving the operation and maintenance of the ATSs.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Saguaro National Park Official Map and Guide. National Park Service. 1998.

Fax from Frank Walker, Superintendent, Saguaro National Park. November 15, 1999.

Fax from Frank Walker, Superintendent, Saguaro National Park. November 18, 1999.

Saguaro National Park Digital Maps. National Park Service Web Site. November 16, 1999.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Frank Walker. Telephone conversation. November 15, 1999.